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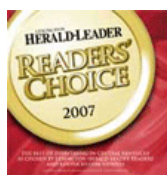
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Senate confirms agriculture secretary

 By MARY CLARE JALONICK
 Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON -- The Senate confirmed Edward Schafer as agriculture secretary with no objections on Monday even though Congress and the administration have differing views over a pending five-year farm bill.

The former North Dakota governor was confirmed by unanimous consent and attended President Bush's State of the Union address several hours later with other members of the cabinet.

Senators voiced no concerns about Schafer's nomination at a congenial confirmation hearing in the Senate Agriculture Committee last week. But several members of the panel encouraged him to work with Congress to smooth stalled talks on the \$286 billion farm bill passed by both the House and Senate last year.

At issue are tax provisions added to both versions of the bill that are intended to raise additional money for farm programs. The Bush administration says the bills use funding gimmicks and tax increases to supplement a farm economy that is already strong, and acting Agriculture Secretary Charles Conner has shown little willingness to negotiate on that point.

The White House also says neither bill does enough to limit payments to wealthy farmers, arguing that Congress should adapt an administration proposal that would ban subsidies to farmers whose gross income exceeds an average of \$200,000 a year. Bush has threatened to veto both bills.

In a statement, Bush said Schafer "distinguished himself as an executive with a proven record of results."

"He will work with the Congress to pass a responsible farm bill that will provide a safety net for farmers and protect our lands and the environment, while at the same time ensuring federal tax dollars are spent wisely," Bush said.

Bush nominated Schafer in October to replace former Nebraska Gov. Mike Johanns, who left the agriculture post to run for the Senate. Schafer was a Republican governor of North Dakota from 1992 to 2000.



Jose Luis Magana/AP Photo
 Former North Dakota Gov. Edward T. Schafer speaks during his nomination hearing for Secretary of Agriculture before the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry on Capitol Hill Thursday, Jan. 24, 2008, in Washington.



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